HARIDAS THAKURA AND THE HARLOT

from *Sri Chaitanya-Bhagavata, Adi-lila* Chapter 16

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CAST: Ramachandra Khan, 3 prostitutes Champaka, Parijata and Padmini, Haridas Thakura.

SCENE ONE

(The sitting room of the local Muslim governor of Jagannath Puri, Ramachandra Khan. Three prostitutes are waiting)

Champaka: I wonder what Ramachandra Khan has brought us here for the three most beautiful society girls in the village?

Parijata: Well, he is a Hindu chieftain, with a large following and vast sums of wealth to command. Whatever it is, I'm sure it will be to our advantage!

Padmini: Yes, it's all very exciting!

Champaka: Did he mention anything to either of you about a secret mission?

Parijata: Yes, but he wouldn't say any more than that. I wish he'd get here soon!

Padmini: Patience, dear sisters!

Champaka: I think I hear footsteps coming this way. **(they quickly sit and assume poses)**

Khan: Good evening, ladies! **(they all acknowledge, he goes around and takes each one's hand)** I am so glad you have come here tonight. As I told you briefly, I would have need of your services in a matter which is very important to me. I am very disturbed about the presence in our village of a character named... named... well, they call him Haridas, although he is actually a low-class Muslim by birth. He does not understand our sophisticated Hindu culture and religion. He is inducting low-class people to overstep their bounds and engage in brahminical activities. And all over people are neglecting their work and join in this annoying chanting of *mantras.* It is a disturbance to society. Anyway, he is posing as a *sadhu,* and many innocent people are being deceived. But, my friends and I have devised a plan to discredit him. That's why I called for all of you.

Parijata: And what exactly do you need, sir?

Khan: I would like all of you to spoil the character of this Haridas. He is young and sentimental, and I think he would be an easy victim to the temptations which you might put before him. His falldown will be a great help in stopping these religion-mongers once and for all.

Champaka: Sir, forgive me this plan of yours is very interesting to me in all ways but one.

Khan: What is that?

Champaka: It is this person, Haridas. I do not know very much about spiritual advancement, but I have had occasion to see this man, and I do not think I could be part of this plan. I believe he is a genuine holy man.

Khan: I promise you that the reward will change your mind. **(he brings out jewels)**

Champaka: Sir, ask me this mission for anyone else and I will accept; but not Haridas Thakura. No, I could not do it. Thank you anyway. **(she leaves)**

Khan: Well, and what about you two?

Parijata: I am not sure, either. I have heard some very unusual stories about this Haridas. Many people believe he is glorious. He is a source of inspiration to countless villagers who come from near and far to see him.

Khan: They are mistaken. I tell you he is an imposter. Here, maybe this will change your mind. **(he offers her some gold coins)** Now what do you say?

Parijata: It is very tempting, but no. I am afraid I must also refuse your generous offer. My sins are great enough without causing the falldown of a *sadhu,* even if he is just pretending. I am sorry. Good evening. **(she leaves, and Ramachandra Khan turns to Padmini)**

Khan: Well?

Padmini: I don't know. You plan is beginning to sound a little dangerous...

Khan: How would you like me to set you up in your own private house, with servants to care for you?

Padmini: That would be very nice!

Khan: So?

Padmini: All right, I'll do it.

Khan: Good!

Padmini: I can assure you that I will ruin the character of this Haridas within three days' time.

Khan: Oh happy day! I can't wait! I will supply you with everything you need for success!

Padmini: Good. Then it is settled.

Khan: When you go to see him, I think you should take an armed guard with you to catch him in the act, you know.

Padmini: I don't think that is necessary yet. First let me go by myself and win his confidence, then the next time a guard may accompany me.

Khan: As you wish. My dear, if you are successful you will make me a very happy man!

Padmini: What do you mean, If I am successful? I am beginning to think that this will be the most successful venture of my life!

SCENE TWO

(Inside Haridas's hut. Haridas is seated, chanting with deep concentration. Tulasi Devi is planted by his side. Padmini enters, offers obeisances, and stands for a while. Then she slowly sits down near him, sensuously. She lets her hair down and moves very close to him. When he does not respond, she finally speaks:)

Padmini: O holy sir! You are so young and handsome. How can you live alone, forsaking the customary pleasures of this world? Upon seeing you, what woman would not feel her passion rise? I do not think there is any such lady in the world! Please forgive me, but I have fallen a slave to lust by the sight of your charming appearance. I cannot help myself. If you do not accept me, it will be impossible for me to live!

Haridas: I shall certainly accept your proposal, but I have made a vow to chant a certain number of Holy Names, and as soon as I complete my fixed quota, I shall be able to fulfill your request. In the meantime, please be seated here and listen to the chanting of the Holy Name. **(she waits patiently. Lights dim and then come up to show the passing of night. Disappointed, she rises and leaves)**

SCENE THREE

(Ramachandra Khan's house)

Khan: Ah! My lovely one! Are you successful?

Padmini: Not exactly, sir.

Khan: What happened?

Padmini: I saw him, and I spoke with him. He is interested in me, but he has accepted a certain number of Holy Names to chant and did not quite complete his vow. However, I can assure you that by this evening he will be finished, and then our desire will be fulfilled.

Khan: **(laughing)** Oh, it is good news to hear this! When his reputation is ruined, the people will forget all about this spiritual nonsense and go back to the execution of their proper duties!

Padmini: Very soon you will have what you desire.

SCENE FOUR

(Later in Haridas Thakura's hut. Padmini enters, bows and approaches him)

Haridas: I am sorry that you were disappointed earlier. Please do not be upset with me. I will not fail to accept you, don't worry. Until I finish my quota of names, please stay and listen. As soon as the number is completed, you will have your heart's desire. **(she sits and waits. Lights down and up. She becomes restless and impatient)**

Padmini: How can you do this to me? I need to feel your tender regard!!!

Haridas: I have taken a vow of chanting 300,000 Names of Lord Krishna during this month. I am almost finished. I expected to be done this night, but I have not succeeded. By tomorrow I am sure my vow will be fulfilled and then I will be able to enjoy your company freely. **(disappointed, she leaves)**

SCENE FIVE

(Ramachandra Khan's house. Padmini enters)

Khan: Well, what is the good news?

Padmini: I don't understand him at all! He insists that he will satisfy me, and then he becomes completely absorbed in his chanting and seems to forget that I even exist! I don't know what to do. I have never had such a difficult time seducing someone!

Khan: Do you think he suspects our plan?

Padmini: I don't know... I don't think so. I am beginning to wonder if...

Khan: If what?

Padmini: If he might be a real *sadhu.*

Khan: I assure you he is not.

Padmini: Then I have lost all my charms!

Khan: I assure you *that* is not true, either. Do not be discouraged. He has simply made a show of this vow of artificial renunciation; but secretly he is thinking of you and is waiting anxiously to be joined with you. I am sure that tonight everything will go as planned, and soon we can reveal his false nature to the rest of the village.

Padmini: Perhaps you are right.

SCENE SIX

(Haridas Thakura's hut. Padmini enters, bows and sits)

Haridas: I am glad you have returned. I will definitely complete the number of rounds tonight and fulfill your wish. In the meantime, why don't you join me in chanting the *mantras?* **(he begins to chant and she joins in. Suddenly she bows at his feet and exclaims:)**

Padmini: O Master! Please forgive my offenses at your lotus feet! I am the worst of sinners! Being a harlot by profession, there is hardly any sin that I have not committed! I can now understand that you are not an ordinary person. You are a jewel amongst the devotees of the Lord. Under the instructions of the villain, Ramachandra Khan, I have shamelessly tried to contaminate your devotional heart; but my evil inclinations are totally destroyed. Please have mercy on me and deliver me from this sinful condition!

Haridas: I am fully aware of the evil plots of Ramachandra Khan. He doesn't know what he is doing. I wish him well. It is only for your sake that I continued my stay in this village for these three days. If not, I would have left on the very first day.

Padmini: Please help me become free of the miseries of material existence!

Haridas: First give away all of your wealth, and then you may come here and take shelter in this hut. Chant the Holy Name constantly and worship the sacred Tulasi plant. In a short time, I am sure you will attain the lotus feet of Sri Krishna.

SCENE SEVEN

(In Haridas's hut. Padmini enters, reformed, with offerings of fruit and flowers. Champaka and Parijata approach hut while talking among themselves)

Champaka: Who would have though that the scheme of that old rascal, Ramachandra Khan, would change our lives in such a drastic way?

Parijata: First of all, I couldn't believe our friend Padmini accepted his offer, and then I couldn't believe she became a devotee, and now I can't believe that she's convinced us to change, too!

Champaka: The power of the Holy Names of the Lord can really work miracles!

Parijata: And association with a pure devotee, too.

Champaka: Yes, it's really astonishing; she lives so simply now! She even gave away all her beautiful things and only eats uncooked foods.

Parijata: Sometimes she fasts for days!

Champaka: And people who once hated her now feel it's a great privilege to meet her!

Parijata: What a wonder! All glories to Srila Haridas Thakura!!!

Champaka: And what about Ramachandra Khan?

Parijata: I know it appears that his offenses against the devotees has finally caught up with him. He got so puffed-up that he stopped paying taxes to the Muslims.

Champaka: But then the ruler was offended and forcibly took over his property and put him and his family in prison.

Parijata: He lost everything his caste, his wealth, his relations. I guess he deserved it.

Champaka: Here she is!

Padmini: Welcome, dear friends. Please accept my obeisances. All glories to Haridas Thakura, the most merciful devotee of the Lord! His glory is so great that even one who was once the cause of the downfall of many, and a repository of many foul deeds, can become a devotee of the Lord. I had no aptitude for philosophy, nor was I convinced by argument or mystic powers. Simply by hearing and chanting the Holy Name of the Lord under the guidance of a pure devotee, I was blessed with a taste of spiritual ecstasy and Divine Realization. And this can be true for anyone; no matter how sinful, lusty, greedy or envious they may be. So please take shelter of the Holy Name of the Lord and make your life sublime! **(they have a *kirtan*)**

The End